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ABSTRACT

This staff development kit contains materials and suggestions to help a faculty in its early efforts to implement the middle school concept. It is equally applicable in schools already organized as middle schools but not yet true middle schools in terms of program and/or procedures and in schools making the transition from the junior high school model to that of the advocated middle level school. It is primarily focused on the initiation or orientation phase. The five sections are: (1) "Initiating the Study" (questions to consider in planning the transition, change, and resistance to change); (2) "The Nature of Young Adolescents" (quiz on young adolescents and articles on early adolescence); (3) "The Middle School Concept" (characteristics of developmentally responsive middle level schools and articles and research summaries on middle school); (4) "Curriculum and Instruction" (research summaries on curriculum and instruction, characteristics of a real middle level school, and a position statement by the National Middle School Association on academic achievement); and (5) "Appendices" (four appendices offer a glossary of terms, lists of resources, and keys to quizzes presented in the kit). (SM)

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ED 453 197

STAFF DEVELOPMENT KIT #1

Implementing the Middle School Concept

(Middle School 101)

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CONTENTS OF THE KIT

I. Initiating the Study 2
1. Questions to Consider in Planning for Making the Transition 4
2. On Change... 5
3. People Resist Change in Educational Practices When... 6

II. The Nature of Young Adolescents 7
1. Quiz on Young Adolescents: Myth or Reality? 9
2. Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years 11
(Article prepared for "Month of the Young Adolescent," October 1997)
3. What Does It Mean to be Thirteen? 15
(Article prepared for "Month of the Young Adolescent," October 1998)
4. *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*
(NMSA, 1995) ..... copy included

III. The Middle School Concept 19
1. Back to the Basics 20
2. In Brief (from *This We Believe*, 1982) 21
3. Characteristics of Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools 22
4. Research Summary #1,
"What Grade Configuration is Best for the Middle School?" 23
5. Research Summary #3,
"Numbers of Middle Schools and Students" 25
6. "In This Corner of the World" 27
7. What Middle School Is Not: Persistent Myths 29

IV. Curriculum and Instruction 31
1. Research Summary #4,
"What Are the Components of an Exemplary Middle School?" 32
2. Recommendations of the Carnegie Corporation's report, *Turning Points* 35
3. Ten Questions to Consider in Appraising a Middle Level Program 36
4. Characteristics of a Real Middle Level School 37
5. Research Summary #12, "Academic Achievement" 38
6. Position Statement on Academic Achievement 42

V. Appendices
1. A Glossary of Terms 44
2. Middle Level Education: A Basic Library 47
3. A Basic Library for Parents 51
4. Keys to II-1 and IV-4 52

I. Initiating the Study

This staff development kit contains materials and suggestions that will assist a faculty in its early efforts to implement the middle school concept. It is equally applicable in those schools already organized as middle schools but not yet true middle schools in terms of program and/or procedures and in those schools making the transition from the junior high school model to that of the advocated middle level school. It is primarily focused on the initiation or orientation phase. Additional activities would be required to complete the more difficult and extensive implementation phase.

Users should take time to review the entire contents of the kit in order to decide how best to use the material in their particular situation. While suggestions are given for using the various items, the status and needs of those in a local situation should determine the best use of these materials. Many of the items could be made into transparencies for use in large group discussions.

People just don't like to change. We like the security that comes with familiarity. This is a reality that anyone who advocates change has to face. Item I-2 contains some quotes about change that might be used on posters, on announcements about meetings, or in any way one chooses to help folks deal with the tendency to resist changes. Meetings where the faculty discusses the move to implement the middle school concept might start off with one or two of these thoughts. Have the group reflect and react to them. Make change a topic of conversation, highlighting the need for it.

Item I-3 identifies some generally recognized conditions that create resistance to change. Each of these potential barriers should be addressed and, to the degree possible, met.

From the outset it should be recognized that it will take time, considerable time, to make the changes in curriculum and instruction needed if the middle school concept is to be fully implemented. While local conditions vary greatly, most experts talk in terms of three to five years if essentially starting from scratch. This kit is largely limited to use in the early or initiation phase of the transition.

A basic library of middle school resources should be secured and made available for checkout by faculty members. To adequately grasp the middle school concept takes time, and reading followed by informal discussion among colleagues is an essential part of acquiring that understanding. Having appropriate resources at hand is critical. The list of recommended publications included in the Appendix is keyed to differentiate those particularly important to have in the very beginning stages from those important but not immediately essential publications. As funds permit, of course, all items should be secured.

In addition to using the activities and materials in this kit, schools will likely involve some summer workshops, visits to other schools, conference attendance, college courses, and resource persons in the overall transition plan.

As a school moves to implement the middle school concept, it is especially important that parents be informed and included. Establishing and making readily available a number of resources that are written for parents is a must. In addition to placing these resources on a "parent shelf," ways of getting them and/or the information they contain into the hands of parents is essential. An easy check-out system that will permit parents to take resources home is an essential first step. The "library" might be displayed at a P.T.O. meeting with parents encouraged to check books out then and there. Book reviews by P.T.O. officers shared in newsletters is another way to share the materials. Circles of book talks among parents might be initiated. Parents of young adolescents are apprehensive and anxious; they want help in understanding the role that they now must play as their children become adolescents. Organizing and utilizing a collection of resources will go a long way toward meeting that need. In the Appendix a basic listing of resources for parents is included.

One item on this list, the little brochure, "What Is a Middle School?" is actually a good resource for a faculty that is not already familiar with the major features of a modern middle school.

NMSA's position paper, *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools* (1995) is the most widely circulated and accepted statement about middle level education. A copy is included in this kit, but it would be wise to have copies available for every teacher or team. In addition, copies should be available to share with Board of Education members, parent leaders, and other community persons. This document alone could be the focus of an extensive faculty study over a period of months.

The glossary provided in the Appendix, Item V-1, should be copied and made readily available as teams/faculty pursue their study.

Questions to Consider in Planning for Making the Transition

Based on the assumption that this kit will be used with a faculty, the following questions should be considered as plans for conducting the study are formulated:

1. What small group or committee will serve to provide overall direction to the study and establish the timeline?
2. How will all faculty be involved actively?
3. How will non-certified staff and support personnel be involved in the study?
4. How will the central office, elementary school(s), and high school be involved in the study?
5. How will parents and citizens generally be brought into the study?
6. What outside personnel or resource persons might be needed to assist in the study?
7. In what ways can the students themselves become involved in the study?
8. How will consensus on principles or concepts be achieved?
9. How will the agreed upon principles or plans be implemented?

NOTE: Questions 8 and 9 move the process into the implementation and institutionalization phases of the total change process. At that point new plans and additional activities will be needed.

On Change...

The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.
— Alfred North Whitehead

History makes it clear that every generation goes through the difficult and painful process of transition. Change is inevitable, although it is almost universally resisted.

People are more resistant to the process of changing than they are to the change itself.

The world changes faster than the people in it.

To grow is to change, and to become perfect is to have changed many times.
— Cardinal Newman

Beware of enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes.
— Henry David Thoreau

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind. — William James

He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils for time is the greatest innovator.
— Francis Bacon

Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside.
— Alexander Pope

Remember, before you can change your thinking, you have to change what goes into your head.
— Neila Connors

The man or nation that makes the greatest mistake is one that hesitates to attempt changes for fear of making a mistake. — Lumir Victor Mika

People Resist Change in Educational Practices When...

- The purpose of the proposed change is not understood or agreed to by the vast majority of the faculty and staff.
- Those persons who will be most affected by the change have not been actively involved in planning for the change.
- Communication about the change has been inadequate.
- The persons who will implement the changes, usually teachers, have not been given adequate time and opportunity to understand the change or to deal with their normal fears and apprehensions.
- The pressure to make the change becomes excessive and outstrips opportunities to become comfortable with the proposal.
- All stakeholders (parent, non-certified staff, and citizens) are inadequately informed and involved.
- The group providing leadership and advancing the change is not trusted and respected.
- Administrative leadership does not articulate a vision and provide support and assistance.
- The perceived gain and rewards appear to be too costly. The efforts required are out of balance with what may be achieved.
- The current demands on faculty are not accounted for and acknowledged.

II. The Nature of Young Adolescents

Since the middle school concept is a direct reflection of what is known about the nature and needs of young adolescents, a full understanding of youth between the ages of 10 and 15 is an essential foundation. To help gain this understanding, the kit contains the following four items with suggested ways to use them.

1. As individuals, take the "Quiz on Young Adolescents – Myth or Reality? (Item II-1). With each checking his or her own paper, go over best answers, elaborating, comparing, and eliciting discussion as you work through the items. Where no clear consensus exists, assign individuals to research the items. A key is provided in the Appendix, but it is recommended that discussion on what is the correct answer should take place rather than simple checking of the key. In fact, on a couple of items there could be two right answers, depending on how you look at the statement.

2. Make copies of the article, "Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years" (Item II-2), for each person to read independently. At a specified time after all have read the article, elicit responses from members. Some questions to assist in this effort follow.

   — *Before becoming a middle level teacher had you thought that early adolescence was, indeed, a distinct developmental level?*
   — *Do you feel the author overdoes the special importance of this period of life?*
   — *Can you accept the validity of each of the key generalizations set forth?*
   — *What are some of the programmatic implications of these generalizations?*

3. Make copies of the article, "What Does It Mean to be Thirteen?" (Item II-3) for each person to read independently. Then discuss the article using these questions and others to capture the article's major points:

   — *If you grew up in the 1940s or '50s, could you identify readily with Chris's experiences?*
   — *If you grew up in the '60s, '70s, or '80s, did you experience anything like what Chris experienced?*
   — *How might we use Chris's techniques to engage kids in meaningful conversations and thereby discover more about their real concerns?*
   — *How might we restructure our classroom procedures to increase opportunities for informed but real dialogue with kids to help them know themselves as well as to help us plan educational experiences for them?*

4. Make copies of two portions of NMSA's position paper, *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*, that are particularly useful in achieving a full understanding of young adolescents in our society: (1) the section headed "The Rationale for Middle

Level Schools" on pages 5-10, and (2) the "Characteristics of Young Adolescents" on pages 35-40. Assign an individual to study the first section and share major points with the group. Assign individuals to review carefully each one of the five sections of the list of characteristics and be responsible for highlighting that section, particularly noting the more critical characteristics that relate to how we educate young adolescents or ought to educate them. Examples from their own teaching experience will be effective parts of the review.

Throughout all of the above activities seek to engage everyone. Those in charge should be discussion leaders more than simply "instructors."

Quiz on Young Adolescents: Myth or Reality?

Directions

1. Place an *M* for *Myth* beside each statement that is false although it may be widely accepted as true.
2. Place an *R* for *Reality* beside each statement that is true.

YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

_____1. Human beings grow more rapidly during their adolescent growth spurt than during any other time in their lives except infancy.
_____2. It is abnormal for an 11-year-old girl to have begun to menstruate.
_____3. In an eighth grade classroom you could see a six-to-eight-year span in physical development among the students.
_____4. Adolescence is characteristically a stormy period marked by rebellious, acting-out behavior.
_____5. About 80 percent of all adolescents make it through adolescence without pathological storm and stress.
_____6. During early adolescence, the peer group replaces the family as the most important people in the adolescent's life.
_____7. Periods of disequilibrium are typical in families as young teens and parents work out mutually acceptable ways to accommodate teens' new concerns and parents' continuing responsibilities.
_____8. When young adolescents request increasing levels of autonomy in areas like dress, curfew, and selection of friends, they are demanding complete independence from parents.
_____9. It is normal for young adolescents to appear at times to be self-centered and preoccupied with themselves, often to the exclusion of thoughts or concerns about others.
_____10. Young adolescents usually know and can apply to themselves the personal consequences of such risk-taking behavior as driving or riding in a speeding car, engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse, or hitchhiking on a busy highway.
_____11. Young adolescents tend to have bouts of low self-esteem and self-doubt as they adjust to the rapid and pervasive changes in their bodies and their social relationships.
_____12. Young adolescents have the same thinking and reasoning abilities as adults have.
_____13. Young adolescents' questioning of formerly accepted rules and beliefs may be a sign that they are using their new cognitive abilities.
_____14. Seeking behavioral independence is a new issue for children during adolescence.
_____15. Most young adolescents are concerned about understanding their body changes and incorporating their new physical capabilities and sexual interests into a set of sexual values they have already learned during childhood. While they are serious about the physical sex act, that is not their only sexual concern or interest.
_____16. All young adolescents think and learn in the same way.

(continued)

_____17. Because they are immature, young adolescents are not capable of or interested in having a role in making decisions that affect them, or in helping other people.
_____18. Young adolescents do not want to be separated from the adult world. They need and want opportunities for positive social interaction with adults.
_____19. It is important to young adolescents to know that they have done something well. They want to be successful.
_____20. While they may need them, young adolescents no longer want rules and limits.
_____21. The restlessness of young adolescents is not based on physical factors, only boredom.
_____22. Physical maturity is closely correlated to social maturity.

Schools

_____23. If a school is safe and students perform well on standardized tests, it will also be responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents.
_____24. It is not particularly important to student performance that the school staff hold positive expectations of all students or believe that all children have the ability to learn.
_____25. In academically effective schools, the principal establishes standards for instruction and assumes responsibility for providing supervision and resources to the teaching staff.
_____26. Students behave better and achieve more when teachers praise their work and show appreciation for their accomplishments rather than focusing on their problems and failures.
_____27. It is not important to student academic performance and behavior that large numbers of students assume responsibilities and participate in the operation of the school.
_____28. In academically effective schools, the staff and students often verbalize and accept many different understandings of the school's purpose, philosophy, expectations, and rules.
_____29. Additional resources (money, personnel) will almost always lead to increased school effectiveness.
_____30. There is no consistent relationship between school effectiveness and class size.
_____31. Effective schools are open to evaluation and change and have established mechanisms for self-evaluation.
_____32. In a single seventh grade classroom there is likely to be as much as a six- or seven-year span in the achievement of pupils.
_____33. High achieving students may be affected by peer pressure not to be "a brain."
_____34. Cross-grade or multiage grouping in the middle school is not justified by human growth and development.

Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years

By John H. Lounsbury

Growing Up Forgotten, thus Joan Lipsitz entitled her landmark study and captured the major reality revealed by her research. Subtitled, *A Review of Research and Programs Concerning Early Adolescence*, this 1977 publication was instrumental in bringing recognition to early adolescence as a distinct stage of human development. While our language limited the classification of human to infants, children, adolescents, and adults, the years of transition between childhood and full adolescence comprise a unique stage, one not well served by our society and its institutions. In fact, these years have not been seen as constituting an important period at all. Lipsitz' study documented the limited research, attention, and advocacy focused on young adolescents. The beliefs generally held about them have been largely negative and are more myths than realities. Gradually, however, in the last two decades society has come to acknowledge this stage of life as a period that warrants special attention. The booming middle school movement is focused on providing an appropriate educational program for 10 to15 year olds.

The central importance of early adolescence

Young adolescents do not just get bigger; distinctively different bodies emerge from these growing years. More extensive physical and personal changes now occur than at any other time of life. While the physical changes are the most obvious, profound changes are taking place in mental, social, emotional, and moral development.

The dramatic physical changes do not occur at the same time or at the same rate. The fact that girls mature a year and a half to two years ahead of boys is widely recognized, but the tremendous variation in the rate and timing of the developmental processes of both boys and girls is not so well known. Some boys have achieved puberty before some girls have started. And what one child accomplishes in growth in 18 months may take up to three or more years in another. As a result, a seventh grade class is likely to include men, women, and children. It is virtually impossible for young adolescents to keep their chronological age in conformity with their social age, physical age, intellectual age, and/or social/sexual age. The priorities of young adolescents tend to be on their social and physical development, a fact many teachers unwisely ignore.

Of all the types and kinds of development that occur during these early adolescent years, one kind is of particularly critical importance, yet it has seldom been recognized. No other age level is of more importance to the future of individuals, and, literally, to that of society because these are the years when youngsters crystallize their beliefs about themselves and firm up their self-concepts, their philosophies of life, and their values – the things that are the ultimate determinants of their behavior. And having left these formative years, individuals change very, very little in significant ways in values and standards. Alfred North Whitehead proclaimed that these are the years "during which the lines of character are graven." Albert Schweitzer also considered that "the most important years in life are those between nine and fourteen. This is the time to plant the seeds of knowledge in the mind – afterwards it is too late. This is the time to acquaint the young with the great spirits of mankind." More recently the early adolescent years have been viewed as the second and last chance

to influence youth, to set their direction for the future. In light of this reality, the case for declaring the early adolescent years as the most important period of life is clear.

The positive potential of early adolescence

The statistics concerning youth crime, teenage pregnancy, and other forms of aberrant behavior are indeed frightening. The media have given ample play to reports of such conditions. As a result we have overlooked the fact that the vast majority of young adolescents do not smoke, drink, engage in sex, or take drugs. They sing in church choirs, visit the elderly, are active in 4-H clubs, and otherwise act responsibly both in school and out. They move through "the perils of puberty" smoothly with little of the "storm and stress" once attributed to this period of transition.

Young adolescents are a wondrous group, eager, enthusiastic, curious, adventuresome, full of life, fresh, and refreshing. They are genuine and do not shine in borrowed plumes. Their honesty is often disarming. They have a sense of humor, albeit one that is sometimes a bit weird. We should celebrate this stage of endless discovery during which youth come of age. Their capacities for thinking and reflecting are unfolding. Their outward behavior may belie the seriousness of their inner thoughts, but those who work closely with these young people know of their concern for the less fortunate, the environment, and other national problems. They worry about nuclear war, HIV, family disintegration, and moral issues. Their penchant for service is expressed in such things as can-a-thons, service learning projects, and campaigns to save the whales. They seek heroes and heroines, individuals of character and conscience, ones whose examples can be emulated. This is not the time for adults to abdicate their critically important guidance role, yet this is too often what happens as adults assume that the peer group takes over.

Education – a family and community affair

"The great American dream is universal education. The great American tragedy is that education is confused with schooling." This statement, made long ago by William Graham Sumner, points to a truth that bears serious consideration. In recent times we have tended to narrow our understanding of the word *education* to what takes place in school, formal education. We have as a result isolated the school from other educational enterprises. Schooling is actually a relatively recent addition to the activities of civilized man. It is interesting to note the statement made in the Northwest Ordinance of 1778: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools AND the means of education shall forever be encouraged" (emphasis added).

We have exalted formal education and heaped upon it tremendous, even excessive responsibilities. Education goes on before and after school as well as in school. (In fact, much of school time is spent countering the education youths get in the classrooms of the community.) Education, inevitably and properly, is a family and community affair, a collective responsibility of school, home, and community. Whenever one side of that triangle fails, a child's education is shortchanged in a manner for which neither of the other sides can compensate.

The most important teachers one ever has are one's parents. In addition, every citizen, by his or her behavior, "teaches" someone something. School teachers, although formally trained as such, can never by themselves successfully educate youth for effective living in today's world. Adult models

and informal instructors operating outside the classroom must share in the responsibility of educating youth. Such "teaching" does not call for specialized training. It only requires a sensitivity to the lessons children learn in home and community activities. In these experiences it is hoped that they will require positive attitudes and standards of behavior that will support formal education in the school. The curriculum of the home, it could be said, is a chief determinant of success in the curriculum of the school. Deficiencies in students' attitudes about learning are more the problem than deficiencies in their abilities. Education Secretary Richard Riley recently made this statement:

> *Thirty years of research shows that when family and community members are directly involved in education, children achieve better grades and higher test scores, have much higher reading comprehension, graduate at higher rates, are more likely to enroll in higher education, and are better behaved.*

Improving the performance of our schools requires improving the quality of life outside of school. Our view of education must encompass that broader concept. Formal schooling is an increasingly important factor in achieving a satisfying and productive life, but without the active support of informal schooling, it will be insufficient. The education of our youth is America's biggest and most important job. It calls for the active participation of all.

Building schools for young adolescents

As family and community come to better understand young adolescents, support for the schools will increase. This will enhance the likelihood that the school will be able to fulfill its primary responsibility for intellectual development and achievement. The middle school movement has sought to create educational institutions that recognize all we know about 10 to 15 year olds and design programs accordingly. This calls for developing the skills of critical thinking and problem solving, along with continued emphasis on increased competence in reading, writing, and speaking. The mastery by all students of mathematical and scientific concepts, in keeping with the demands of today's world, requires more than simple arithmetic and basic biology. Varied instructional strategies are being introduced to accommodate diverse learning styles, levels of mental maturation, and the range of students' prior achievement.

Middle level educators seek to involve students in the entire teaching/learning enterprise in lieu of the passive learning so prominent in the past. Students are challenged and motivated to learn when they are participants in educational activities rather than mere compliant followers of others' directions. As students assume increased responsibility for their learning, they are able to evaluate their own progress. Through exploratory and enrichment activities they are able to identify their interests and aptitudes.

Teaching in the middle school is especially difficult and demanding. Given the nature of young adolescents, middle level educators inevitably are involved in more than the acquisition of information. They must be cognizant of varied levels of development, existing attitudes, diverse cultures, and give sufficient attention to the non-cognitive aspects of student growth in order that the cognitive aspects can be achieved successfully.

While the middle school movement in the last three decades has achieved remarkable success in developing schools that challenge and educate fully this unique group of students, much remains to be done.

Key generalizations about young adolescents

Based on recent research and analysis concerning this age group, the following generalizations can serve as guideposts for deciding on ways that young adolescents might be better served by school, home, and community.

- Early adolescence is a distinctive developmental stage of life.
- The general public has limited understanding of these 10 to 15 year olds.
- The accelerated physical and personal development that occurs during this period is the greatest in the human life cycle and is marked by great variance in both the timing and rate of growth.
- These are the years during which each individual forms his/her adult personality, basic values, and attitudes – those things that determine one's behavior.
- Adolescents reach physical maturity at an earlier age than their grandparents and they acquire apparent sophistication earlier than in previous generations.
- They seek autonomy and independence.
- They are by nature explorers, curious and adventuresome.
- They have intellectual capacities seldom tapped by traditional schooling.
- They learn best through interaction and activity rather than by listening.
- They seek interaction with adults and opportunities to engage in activities that have inherent value.
- Their physical and social development become priorities.
- They are sensitive, vulnerable, and emotional.
- They are open to influence by the significant others in their lives.
- A significant portion of today's teenage population is alienated from society.

Conclusion

All adults should be advocates for young adolescents, ready, willing, and able to capitalize on the positive possibilities of students. Adults should be sensitive to the enduring importance of the experiences youth undergo during these formative years and fully conscious of the influence they have as examples.

This article was published as a part of the first celebration of the Month of the Young Adolescent. John Lounsbury currently serves as Publications Editor for National Middle School Association. Lounsbury has been actively involved with the junior high school/middle school movement for more than 45 years.

What Does It Mean to Be Thirteen?

By Chris Stevenson

Our adult perceptions and values are inevitably an outgrowth of experience, and my recollections of early adolescence seem halcyon to me today. At 13 I worked 20 hours a week at the pharmacy in a small Alabama town, and I loved it. Three years earlier I had begun as a delivery boy, bicycling prescription medications after school to shut-ins for $2 a week. By eighth grade I had advanced to a $22 a week half-time position in which I had heady responsibilities: ordering "sundries" such as candy, cosmetics, and gifts; decorating the store's front windows; working the soda fountain; and keeping customer charge accounts up to date in the ledger. School was okay – my friends were there, my grades were good, and the teachers were nice and well-intentioned – but their offerings lacked the zip and zing I craved.

My life out of school was filled with real conversations with adults – my boss, Mr. Maxwell, and co-workers, customers, business people who would drop in for coffee or a Cherry Coke, and salesmen who called on "Mr. Max" who would introduce me as his "Chief Buyer." I also loved to read, and I can still recall lots of the many books I consumed. Communication with my parents and other relatives was comfortable and relevant. I remember family stories, talk about sports, the war in Korea, and the lyrics of Hank Williams' tunes. By no means had I figured out exactly who I was, but I felt secure in the knowledge that I mattered and that adults trusted and respected me. On reflection I realize how very blessed and protected that period of my life was and how different it was from so many of the kids I knew then as well as today. How much it matters to have clear, unfettered communication between interested adults and young adolescents!

But that was me and also then – the 1950s. Today the cultural distance between adults and young adolescents seems especially large. Yet, I know that every young person still longs for adult relationships built on genuine interest and mutual respect. Each young person is confronting perplexing issues and dealing with urgent questions, conflicting priorities, unsteady expectations, unadulterated joys, and a complex of apprehensions and aspirations – just as we did. What we have in common is that the primary challenge of growing up remains the same as what we faced in our time: becoming the very best one can be. There's no doubt how valuable supportive adults can be.

But this is a very different time, and the pressures and temptations youngsters face are considerably different and more consequential than what we knew. In many ways they do know much more than we did about what it means to be 13. Thus, before we can tell them the important things we know and believe, we must learn from them the actualities of their 13-year-old world. We must first become very skillful at listening.

Authentic talk between young adolescents and nurturing, responsible adults is eminently valuable. When that talk is about matters of substance and is connected to kids' lives, it can become a powerful influence on their developing judgment and subsequent decisions. Middle level educators' initiatives to integrate curriculum studies reflect their understanding that far more meaningful learning occurs when students' questions, ideas, and perceptions are integrated with teachers' goals and teaching objectives. When kids disclose their perceptions and speculations, it is because they see our interest as genuine. In turn they're much more likely to take us and our values seriously. For teachers and parents, true fulfillment lies in the realization that they are genuinely trusted by their children.

Sometimes there is an initial awkwardness for both generations in getting started on real conversation of the kind one has with a trusted peer. As the older generation, however, there are some initiatives we can take to help cultivate a better quality of communication. That is what this piece is about.

Tell me about yourself

Often the most immediate problem that faces adults is finding a way to get into meaningful conversations with young adolescents. Countless interviews over the years have taught me that a simple invitation to "tell me about yourself" works well. They choose what they are willing to talk about, and that very action assures that they are in charge of where the conversation goes. Often they will respond with some version of, "What do you want to know?" I always counter with simply, "Just tell me about yourself." After all, the goal is to establish real communication. Real talk precedes and encourages real trust.

In my experience young adolescents tend to talk about themselves in three ways. For one, they usually comment about things they like to do ("I like to listen to music, read, hang out with my friends"), and/or things they do well ("I'm a good speller, a fast runner, a good snowboarder"). Often that description invites further inquiry, "Tell me about snowboarding." It has been interesting to me to see how such examples provide further self-definition, and sometimes the follow-up turns into rich discussion, especially when the youngster knows more than the adult. Since the focus is on having youngsters teach us about themselves, it is imperative for us to go where they want to take the conversation, even if we aren't particularly interested in their taste in music or proficiency in riding a snowboard. In terms of earnestly trying to get to know another person, this informal approach to building credible conversation is no different from what one does when seeking good communication with another adult.

A second way young adolescents often respond to the invitation to talk about themselves is in terms of things they have: a 10-speed bike, a baseball card collection, a pet, a Tommy Hilfiger sweater. Such connections between oneself and one's possessions should not be equated with materialism, although they may later prove to be indicators of such a value. It has been very common in my experience for youngsters to talk comfortably about things they have. They will sometimes refer to siblings or other family members or a best friend. Again, this is a cue for us to follow with, "Tell me (more) about your tarantula/bike/sister." By and large, younger kids of 10, 11, and 12 may find it easier to talk about things they have than the abstraction of "personal identity."

As the communication grows over time into conversations that are credulous and reflect confidence, young adolescents often talk about themselves in a third way that comes closer to existential awareness. The realization that "I am who I am" may be reflected in safe statements such as "I'm a Yankees' fan," but these may also grow into more parochial self-definitions such as, "I'm opposed to nuclear arms," or "I'm a vegetarian." Much of the substantial social and psychological change that occurs during these years is a transition from relatively simplistic thought about who one is to the considerably greater complexities of recognizing one's fuller uniqueness, individuality, and ties with family and others that constitute identity and character. Such realizations can lead to increasing engagement in talk with trusted others, including adults. This is also an area where the quality of communication with parents is so urgent. When such connections between adolescents and their parents or other adult authority figures thrive, kids exhibit a much stronger internal locus of control, i.e., they make decisions and exercise judgment based on personal standards learned from significant adults in their lives. They become personally stronger and are less vulnerable to indiscriminate peer pressure.

Matters of interest

An infinite number of topics and issues are on the minds of contemporary young adolescents. We can anticipate some of those conversational possibilities, so it is worthwhile to contemplate the shared social context as a source of possibilities. For example, the scoutmaster assumes a youngster's interest in being successful in scouting and can naturally invite conversation about "your thoughts about merit badges." Similarly, a coach can ask, "What about the Red Sox this year?" Getting into conversation around a mutual interest is generally less difficult than starting from scratch.

Music is almost always a good entree to conversation. Most young adolescents have preferences for types of music or genre and performers. Don't be surprised if you find that your own favorites – even if they include the Grateful Dead or Rolling Stones – are passé. I have enjoyed ongoing dialogue with adolescents about their musical preferences, and I am certain that those conversations have served as a path to other talk about matters of considerably greater consequence.

There are numerous topics youngsters write about at school, and sometimes those may become a basis of conversation. An eighth grader recently told me about a paper she had written in which she compared the structure of music to that of a house. Given my limited understanding of the structure of music, I can't judge how well her concept worked. However, I was captivated by the thought, precision, and enthusiasm of her explanation. I asked her to "tell me about other things you're writing or thinking of writing," and our talk intensified. We were both genuinely interested, and I already look forward to our next encounter.

A selection of topics of substance that kids have usually thought about and which they may be willing to discuss with adults includes

- alcohol
- anger
- careers
- death and afterlife
- divorce
- enemies
- family
- friends
- happiness
- human sexuality
- love and relationships
- money
- religion
- abortion
- animal welfare
- conflict
- death penalty
- drugs and drug use
- environmental abuse
- freedom
- future
- homelessness
- justice
- marriage
- parents
- respect
- responsibilities
- runaways
- siblings
- success
- right and wrong
- schooling
- sportsmanship
- war

Of course, it would be imprudent to abruptly initiate conversation on any of these topics without having previously built a credible interpersonal relationship. But most of these are real issues in the contemporary lives of youth, and they are within a sphere of present and eventual decision-making that begs for careful analysis and responsible personal resolution. There is arguably nothing of greater concern to parents than the choices and decisions their children will make at this critical transition stage of life.

Self-knowledge

To the extent that it is possible to generalize about adult society, it appears to have ruled that kids' primary responsibility is to be successful at school. High grades, high test scores, and academic honors are the indicators of success that most adults seem to trust. Likewise, we celebrate athletic achievements. We are particularly good at affirming youngsters' accomplishments at the extreme, and such achievements naturally lead us to engage those kids in dialogue about what they have accomplished. However, do not be surprised if such high achievers prefer to talk about other things; they are often, but not always, disposed to elaborate their conquests. Further, for

every exceptional achiever, there are numerous less celebrated; even overlooked or ignored, kids. And they matter, too. So our initiative should be to go into one-to-one conversations with a completely open mind. I have learned over the years that first impressions are more influenced by my own expectations than by the actuality of the young person I am engaging.

Young adolescents know they are changing. They have to make many adjustments as they move from childhood toward adulthood and confront physical, emotional, and social changes. They speculate a lot privately about what is going on. Some of them are afraid of it all, and self-confidence is especially vulnerable. Some of the questions they think about and which can provoke helpful discussion with trusted adults follow:
What do I know about...

- myself as a learner?
- my special abilities and talents?
- what is excellent work?
- how I can produce excellence?
- how to organize my learning?
- what is difficult for me to learn? To do?
- how I can get help? Give help?
- most effective ways for me to learn?
- teaching that helps me learn?
- teaching that doesn't work for me?
- working alone? Working with others?
- how I can become more successful?
- how I am growing? Changing? Improving?

A century and more ago most young adolescents were not in school; universal schooling is a relatively recent invention, and specialized schooling for this age group is even more recent. Kids worked on farms and in factories and shops, and we know they were often grievously exploited because they could work long hours for little pay without rebelling against adult authority. Leaders of that time responded to that form of child abuse with laws to protect them, and that was without doubt the right thing to do. However, it did not come without some loss. As children spend more and more of their time in school and other activities provided for their age group, they have less opportunity to interact with adults, working and talking together. In reflecting on my own early adolescence almost fifty years ago, I recognize that my daily interactions with adults had inestimable impact on my developing values and self-confidence. That is one of the reasons why I believe I was so privileged in growing up, and it is the chief reason why I advocate now for adults to engage youth in real talk about what it means to be their age. Only through their telling and our listening for understanding can we presume to know what it means to be 13 or 14 or 12 or 11 or 10. And our youth very much need our understanding and advocacy.

This article was published as a part of the second celebration of the Month of the Young Adolescent. Chris Stevenson, a widely published author, was a teacher and principal at the middle level for 18 years. He is currently Professor of Education at the University of Vermont.

III. The Middle School Concept

Just what is the middle school concept? The middle school movement? What are the distinguishing characteristics of schools seeking to practice the concept? Why should we seek to become a middle school? The following activities can be used to help answer such questions. Materials and suggested activities in Section IV, "Curriculum and Instruction," will extend consideration of this topic.

1. Make copies of the handout "Back to the Basics of Middle Level Education" (Item III-1) for each individual. In an open session go over each of the points made, discussing its validity, importance, and implications. Encourage dialogue, examples, and questions, rather than passive acceptance.

2. NMSA's first position paper, *This We Believe*, published in 1982, identified 10 characteristics of a "true" middle school and a statement of justification. Make copies of Item III-2 as needed to review this early list and discuss its continuing validity.

3. Compare the list with the characteristics given in the 1995 position paper *This We Believe* (Item III-3), identifying similarities and differences. To what degree are differences accounted for in the 12-plus years between these two publications?

4. Use Research Summaries #1 and #3 (Items III-4 and III-5) to gain a general picture of the status of middle schools. Have someone present the major figures to the faculty, noting the organizational patterns in nearby districts. Ask members of the group who as students went through a 7-9, a 5-8, a 7-12, or other pattern to comment on their experiences. Discuss possible advantages and disadvantages of 7-9, 6-8, 5-8, and 7-8.

6. Use the statement, "In This Corner of the World" (Item III-6) as an inspirational reading. It presents nicely some aspects of the middle school concept that might be overlooked in more formal listings of characteristics.

7. While the middle school has established itself, it still suffers from being "new" and different in many ways from the more traditional junior high school. As a result, the middle school is subject to myths and misunderstandings. Use Item III-7 to come to grips with these myths. It would be particularly desirable to interview parents ascertaining their perceptions and concerns. Plan too to take the offensive by pointing out how the middle school leads to improved achievement and more positive attitudes.

   In Section IV, Curriculum and Instruction, Items IV-5 and IV-6 deal specifically with the academic achievement issue. It might be appropriate to use them here, but this is a decision best made by those sensitive to the local situation.

Back to the Basics of Middle Level Education

Because it is relatively new and apparently different, people ask, "Just what is a middle school?" In its simplest terms, it could be defined as an educational institution specifically designed to serve youth in the transition period between childhood and full adolescence, most commonly composed of grades 6-8. The grades in the school, however, are not the key consideration – the programs provided during these years, wherever they are housed, are the primary concern.

But why do we need a middle school?

Because this age group, comprised roughly of those between the years of 10 and 15, has some unique features and special importance, to wit

1. More growth occurs during these years than at any other time of life. Extensive physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth are all ongoing during these years. Young adolescent priorities are on their social and physical development.

2. While all move through the puberty/maturation cycle and experience a growth spurt, they do so at greatly varying times and speeds. We group them together, therefore, not because they are alike, a homogeneous group, but because they are not alike. The middle school exists to serve diversity, not commonality.

3. The adult personality is formed during the middle level years. This includes the basic self-concept, philosophy of life, values, and attitudes — the ultimate determinants of one's behavior, now and in the future.

4. Despite its enduring importance, this distinctive developmental period is little understood and has been greatly neglected. Only in the last three decades has it received the serious attention of researchers, educators, social service professionals, doctors, and various youth service agencies.

5. Incidents of various forms of social distress (suicide, crime, drugs, teenage pregnancy, etc.) skyrocket during this period as youth become curious and adventuresome.

6. The educational programs typically provided during these years have been less well correlated with the nature and needs of the age level than at the other levels. The middle school will succeed, fully and finally, to the degree, and only to the degree, that it reflects in its program and its practices a working knowledge of the nature and needs of young adolescents — and that knowledge is shared by the school community.

In Brief

From *This We Believe*, NMSA, 1982

National Middle School Association believes that

- the middle school is an educational response to the needs and characteristics of youngsters during the transition from childhood to full adolescence and, as such, deals with the full range of intellectual and developmental needs;
- young people going through the rapid growth and extensive maturation that occurs in early adolescence need an educational program that is distinctively different from either the elementary or the secondary model;
- existing programs for this age group have all too often lacked focus on young adolescent characteristics and needs;
- educators, school board members, parents, and citizens generally need to become more cognizant of this age group and what an effective educational program for this group requires;
- no other age level is of more enduring importance because the determinants of one's behavior as an adult, self-concept, learning interests and skills, and values largely are formed in this period of life;
- the developmental diversity of this age group makes it especially difficult to organize an educational program that adequately meets the needs of all;
- the academic needs of middle school students are affected greatly by their physical, social, and emotional needs, which also must be addressed directly in the school program.

A true middle school will evidence the following conditions or characteristics, called essential elements:

1. Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents.
2. A balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents.
3. A range of organizational arrangements.
4. Varied instructional strategies.
5. A full exploratory program.
6. Comprehensive advising and counseling.
7. Continuous progress for students.
8. Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents.
9. Cooperative planning.
10. Positive school climate.

Characteristics of Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools

Identified in *This We Believe*, 1995, National Middle School Association's Position Paper

The National Middle School Association believes

- Developmentally responsive middle level schools are characterized by
  - Educators committed to young adolescents
  - A shared vision
  - High expectations for all
  - An adult advocate for every student
  - Family and community partnerships
  - A positive school climate

- Therefore, developmentally responsive middle level schools provide
  - Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory
  - Varied teaching and learning approaches
  - Assessment and evaluation that promote learning
  - Flexible organizational structures
  - Programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
  - Comprehensive guidance and support services

NMSA Research Summary #1

Grade Configuration

Question: What grade configuration is best for the middle grades?

Shift over the years

It is difficult to say definitively that one particular grade configuration is "best." However, trends over the past two decades indicate a shift from junior high schools (grades 7-9) to middle schools (grades 5-8 and grades 6-8). Several studies documented the growth in the percentage of schools organized in the 6-7-8 pattern from 15 percent (Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, & Keefe, 1981) to 40 percent (Alexander & McEwin, 1989) to 50 percent (Valentine, Clark, Irvin, Keefe, & Melton, 1993), to 55 percent (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins,1995). This same study reported that only 13 percent of the intermediate grade schools were 7-9 schools.

In a 1993 national study, 65 percent of the principals reported that their schools had moved to a 5-8 or 6-8 grade level configuration, as compared to 25 percent in 1981 reporting such a change (Valentine, et al., 1993).

Perceptions of the ideal grade configuration

Most administrators consider the 6-8 grade configuration as ideal for developmentally appropriate middle level programs. When asked for the ideal grade configuration, 72 percent of the principals, 59 percent of the assistant principals, and 65 percent of the leadership team members chose the 6-8 grade level pattern over other choices (Valentine, et al., 1993).

Since changing schools often brings anxiety, especially for girls, related to interruption of peer groups (Simmon & Blyth, 1987), it is important that they go into a school that accommodates the needs of young adolescents. Some educators recommend including fifth grade in the middle level school. Middle schools have made deliberate attempts to provide structures, such as teaming and advisor/advisee, that create smaller groups to foster caring relationships. Such an environment is less likely to be found in departmentalized junior highs.

National studies

Effective programs and practices, not grade configuration, determine quality schools. Researchers found that middle grades practices most responsive to the needs of young adolescents were found in schools with configurations of 6-8 grades. Such practices address social, personal, and academic development through strong advisory programs, activity periods, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaming, and exploratory classes.

Epstein and Mac Iver (1990) concluded that grade span makes a real difference in the education of young adolescents because middle school (6-8 grades and 5-8 grades) implement more of the recommended middle school practices.

Alexander and McEwin (1989) and McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) reported that the 6-8 grade configuration is most popular, and that the middle school organization of grades 6-8 is most

likely to provide the key characteristics of recommended practices and programs for young adolescents. They add, "However, we did find that grades 5-8 schools, although far less numerous, were about as likely to have these characteristics as grades 6-8 ones" (p. 84).

The incorporation of recommended practices for young adolescents remains the key to being effective with the 10 to 14 age group. Regardless of grade span, principals rated their programs higher if they used such practices as interdisciplinary teams of teachers, common planning time, 8-period days, flexible schedules, activity periods, or cooperative learning. Not the grade configuration, but the implementation of good practices, making strong programs, determines effective schools for young adolescents (National Middle School Association, 1995).

Related articles

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NMSA Research Summary #3

Numbers of Middle Schools and Students

Question: How many middle schools are there in comparison to junior high schools? How many schools are there with middle level students?

Definitions

Middle school: mainly 6-8 schools, but also 5-8, 5-7, and 7-8; based on developmental needs (social and academic) of young adolescents, organized by interdisciplinary teams, with flexible organizational structures, using varied learning and teaching approaches (NMSA, 1995).

Junior high school: mainly grades 7-9, but also 6-9 and 5-9, conceived primarily as a downward extension of secondary education, organized by subjects and departments, with a grade level configuration (VanTil, Vars, Lounsbury, 1967) that usually includes ninth grade.

Status: Total number of schools

The total number of schools serving grades 5-9 grew from 10,395 schools in 1970 to 10,857 schools in 1987, an increase of 4 percent (Alexander & McEwin, 1988). In 1991, there were approximately 12,100 total middle level schools (Valentine et al., 1993). By 1993-94 the number had increased to 13,543 middle level schools (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 1995).

Growth trends of middle schools and junior highs

Middle schools have grown in the past two decades while the number of junior highs has decreased. From 1970 to 1987 grades 6-8 increased 160 percent, 5-8 schools increased 47 percent, and 7-8 schools increased 7 percent (Alexander & McEwin, 1988). Junior highs decreased by 53 percent, from 4,711 schools to 2,191. In 1993 the number of junior high schools had dropped to 1,425 (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995).

In 1973, there were 2,308 public middle schools and 7,878 public junior high schools. Twenty years later, there were approximately three middle schools for every junior high, with 9,573 middle schools and 3,970 junior highs in 1993-93 (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 1995). This figure included 7-8 schools as junior high schools.

Percentage of schools by grade span

In 1991-92 approximately 12,100 total middle level schools consisted of the following proportions: 40 percent were 6-8 schools; 24 percent 7-8 schools, 19 percent 7-9 schools, 11 percent 6-8 schools; 6 percent other patterns (Valentine, 1993).

The 1993 breakdown as reported by McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1995) was as follows:

grades 5-8: 1,223 (11 percent)
grades 6-8: 6,155 (55 percent)
grades 7-8: 2,412 (22 percent)
grades 7-9: 1,425 (13 percent)

Consolidation and the number of single grade centers and other atypical organizational patterns make it difficult to report accurately. However, the clear trends are well documented.

Number of middle level students

The number of schools is not necessarily related to the number of students attending different grade-span schools (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). In a national study of 1,753 public schools, about 40 percent of seventh graders who attended middle schools were housed in 25 percent of all public school buildings, which were middle schools with a 6-8 grade span. Grade K-8 or related combinations usually found in rural areas comprise 32 percent of school buildings, yet only 9 percent of all seventh-graders attend. On the other hand, about 80 percent of all seventh graders attended school in 45 percent of all school buildings described as middle (6-8), grade 7-8 schools, or junior high schools.

Appropriate schools for young adolescents

The key to being effective with 10 to 14 year olds is not the grade configuration of a school *per se* but the incorporation of recommended practices (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990; National Middle School Association, 1995). Regardless of grade span, principals rated their programs high if they used such practices as interdisciplinary teams of teachers, common planning time, 8-period days, flexible schedules, activity periods, or cooperative learning.

Related Articles

1. Chapter 1 of Alexander & McEwin's *Schools in the Middle: Status and Progress.*
2. Chapter 1 of Epstein & Mac Iver's *Education in the Middle Grades: National Practices and Trends.*

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"In this corner of the world, the children are secure and I helped to make it so."

— Harry Stanfield

After attending the National Middle School Conference in Denver, Colorado, I drove up into the mountains and stopped to look across the plains. It was as if I could see forever in the distance. I could see large four-lane roads and interstate highways, two-lane roads, and even dirt tracks. I could see many small towns and villages and several large cities in the distance.

The idea struck me that this view is somewhat like early adolescence looking into the distance of adulthood. It is rocky and inviting with its many directions, opportunities, and color, and the child wants so much to get there. But his transition off the mountain of childhood onto the plains of adulthood will determine which way he goes, which road he chooses, and which town or city he ends up in.

I would like to share a vision I have for this school and community. This vision is focused on these words: "In this corner of the world, the children are secure and I helped to make it so."

I envision a school that sees itself as an agency that is about the business of child growth and development, one that knows it is vital to the community and that reaches into every home in the community.

I see a school that invites all children to come and be a part of it regardless of income, race, test scores, physical or mental handicaps, and does not invite in rhetoric, but invites in substance because it can, and is willing to, respond in a positive way to all the children who arrive at its doorstep.

I envision a school that sees failure in a much larger sense than not turning in a homework paper or than getting a score of 52 on a major test, but can see failure when a child is turned off and tuned out to school, peers, and life.

I see a school that is willing to reach out to the students who tell us every day that they have decided to move to the fringe of society, whether it be through sex, drugs, satanism, or rock – whatever the message – to say to these people, I like you, this place cares about you and is reaching out to you.

I hope for a school that will measure its success by discipline – not by 176 suspensions and 23 expulsions in a year, but by how many students improve their behavior – a school that constantly looks for and encourages improvement in behavior.

I have a vision of a school where curriculum is not broken down into six artificial areas, but where all knowledge is interrelated – a school that can take a current issue, such as the environment, and can integrate all disciplines into the study of that issue.

I envision a school where one walks down the hallways and sees students in groups interacting and working with one another and helping one another in the classroom – a school where students can be seen outside the classroom contrasting a hillside where the soil is eroding and where it is not, and determining why.

I envision a school where students are seen working around the school and looking at the different geometric designs in the buildings and knowing why they are there.

I see a school where a student can be evaluated on the quality of his ideas expressed verbally, as well as those demonstrated with pencil and paper.

I see a school where teachers relish the idea of taking the responsibility for a group of students and see themselves in the true professional sense of making decisions and accepting the responsibility for these decisions – a school where teachers talk about and implement solutions for non-achievers, reluctant learners, and students with behavior problems.

I envision a school where the staff attendance rate exceeds that of the students.

I see a school where parents are involved in teams and teachers' classrooms seeking to help and be involved in all student learning.

I hope for a school that is a safe place for students and employees to work.

I see East Cary Middle School as a place that helps young adolescents move safely onto the plains of adulthood with the skills and the self-confidence to choose the best roads in life.

I know that we will all be proud when we say, "In this corner of the world, the children are secure and I helped to make it so."

The 1989-90 opening address to the faculty of East Cary Middle School, Cary, North Carolina, by Harry Stanfield, Principal.

What Middle School Is Not – Persistent Myths

Middle level education has had a significant impact on the lives of many millions of youngsters in this country during the last 40 years. There is much left to do, but middle level schools have made real progress in providing the kind of educational experiences all young adolescents deserve and need. The early emphasis on school climate and organizational issues, however, having largely succeeded, has now moved to more advanced concern for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

If middle level schools are to meet the unique needs of all young adolescents, the public must have a clear understanding of the goals and functions of schools for this age group and dispel the myths that have handicapped progress. The negative effects of these myths are so powerful and in some cases so inhibiting that communities seeking to implement the middle school concept must acknowledge their existence and deal with them in a straightforward and honest fashion. Among the myths are these three.

1. *The middle school is a "feel-good" school.* Because middle schools are rightfully and necessarily concerned with the entire range of developmental issues that young adolescents face, they have often been criticized for the concern they display for the emotional and social welfare of students. The most persistent myth is that the middle school is more focused on making kids feel good about themselves than it is on children's academic learning. To ignore self-esteem issues at a point of such dramatic growth makes little sense, so exemplary schools strive for balance, recognizing that academic achievement is closely correlated with students' self-esteem.

2. *The middle school exists to prepare students for high school.* The pressure on middle level schools to "cover" what high schools formerly taught or believe should be taught has increased dramatically in recent years. This trend shows no sign of a let-up. Many think that middle schools should continue in the miniature high school mode, modeling the high school in philosophy, curriculum, methods of instruction, and activities. The middle school years, however, are much too important to focus all efforts on the content, coverage, and procedures that presumably prepare students for high school. *Yes*, middle schools should and do prepare students for high school, but they do so by providing a meaningful and challenging program that addresses the several developmental issues young adolescents face.

3. *The middle school is "fun time."* Because of their nature, young adolescents need and learn best with active, hands-on, and engaged learning. But when schools involve students in projects, group work, or applied learning, they are sometimes criticized for activities that are viewed as more fun than serious. When students are actively involved they display passion for their work and genuinely enjoy pursuing information and concepts.

Every middle level school at some time experiences these and other myths. While it is important to be up-front about such common but misguided stereotypes and to pursue them in discussions, it is

more effective to demonstrate how these myths are inaccurate. For example, show students engaged in learning through curriculum fairs and demonstrations; clarify how advocacy programs promote student learning when students feel connected to adults in the school; and illustrate how the middle school program does prepare students for the challenges of high school. It is especially ironic that middle level schools today are under increased scrutiny just at the point when solid and convincing research evidence that supports the middle school concept is available. More than ever, communities need middle level schools based on the valid principles outlined in *This We Believe* (NMSA, 1995).

As the faculty considers what middle schools are, it should also consider what they are not. Keep before them and the parents these fundamental questions that need to be answered as programmatic decisions are made:

1. What do we want our kids to know and be able to do as they move toward adulthood?

2. How do people learn these "things" and the behavioral attributes desired? (How did you learn how to be responsible, self-sufficient, and so forth?)

3. What programs and methods do we need to provide at our school in order to achieve these learnings?

Discussions of such basic questions will help to keep attention on underlying goals rather than on more immediate and expedient matters such as, How long should the homeroom be? Or do we need a six- or a seven-period day? Serious conversations will help to dispel myths.

IV. Curriculum and Instruction

The heart of the middle school concept is in its program, not in its organization. Although usually viewed by the public as an organizational advocacy, the middle school movement is an effort to implement practices known to better serve young adolescents' learning and developmental needs. Even teaming, generally recognized as the essential component of a modern middle school, is a means to an end not an end in itself.

The materials and activities included in this section will help users get a better handle on the implications in curriculum and instruction of the middle school advocacy. Many of these points were initially raised in the materials provided in Section II but are examined more fully in the materials provided in Section III.

It should be kept in mind that this kit is designed to help move a faculty through the initial phase of the transition. The areas of curriculum and instruction are comprehensive, and to deal with them adequately, additional resources and activities will be necessary. The NMSA resource catalog included in the kit carries appropriate publications for use in studying further all aspects of curriculum and instruction.

1. Items IV-1 (Research Summary #4) and IV-2 (*Turning Points* Recommendations) should be examined by every faculty and staff member. This might be accomplished by utilizing common planning time for faculty and arranging for others to meet together in small groups. Following these team and group considerations, the total group should discuss the contents of these two documents.

2. Items IV-3 (Ten Questions) and IV-4 (Characteristics) can be used to apply general recommendations from national sources to the program your school currently has in place. Individuals or teams could answer the ten questions (IV-3) and make a judgment on the twelve items in IV-4. Then, in a faculty meeting, consensus on where our school stands on these two instruments should be achieved. The results should lead to some serious discussion and plans for moving in the direction indicated. A key to Item IV-4 is included in the Appendix, p. 52.

3. Using Items IV-5 and IV-6, the critical issue of academic achievement should be confronted. Copies and an opportunity to dialogue about this issue should be provided for all. Have teachers share their experiences dealing with parents' perceptions.

NMSA Research Summary #4

Exemplary Middle Schools

Question: What are the components of an exemplary middle school?

Philosophy

The purpose and functions of exemplary middle schools center on the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and physical developmental needs of young adolescents (Clark & Clark, 1993; National Middle School Association, 1995). Within a few years, young adolescents undergo rapid physical growth, changes in moral reasoning, the onset of abstract thinking, and introduction to a range of social pressures, including sex, drugs, and violence. Simultaneously, the lifelong developmental tasks of forming a personal identity or self-concept, acquiring social skills, gaining autonomy, and developing character and a set of values are begun (Irvin, 1995). Exemplary middle schools facilitate appropriate programs, policies, and practices that foster the development of these tasks in positive ways.

Characteristics of successful middle schools

Exemplary middle level schools address the distinctiveness of early adolescence with various instructional and organizational features. Five key components are generally recognized by educators, associations, foundations, state boards of education, and researchers. Both empirical data and conventional wisdom support these components.

1. Interdisciplinary teaming refers to the organizational structure of a core of teachers assigned to the same group of students. A variety of configurations have been successful, ranging from two to five team members in two, three, or four subject areas. Teaming provides the structure to support two essential aspects of middle level education: (1) a positive psychosocial environment that allows flexibility and variety (Keefe, et al., 1983), and heterogeneous grouping of students (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993) and (2) a structure to plan and deliver a curriculum that balances academic and humane factors (NMSA, 1995). Because teachers share the same students and have a common planning period, they are able to respond more quickly to the needs of individual students though collaboration, meeting jointly with parents, and designing thematic units that foster the transfer of ideas among disciplines and increase relevance.

2. Advisory programs consist of a small group of students (usually 20 or fewer) assigned to a teacher, administrator, or other staff member for a regularly scheduled meeting to discuss topics of concern to students. The purpose of this program is the development of close, trusting relationships between students and adults and to increase engagement with learning and feelings of positive self-esteem and belonging. Social and academic support activities include "discussing problems with individual students, giving career information and guidance, developing student self-confidence and leadership, and discussing academic issues,

personal or family problems, social relationships, peer groups, health issues, moral or ethical issues, and multicultural issues/intergroup relations" (Mac Iver, 1990, p. 459). Teacher advisories also help create more positive school climates, develop students' self-concepts, and prevent dropouts (George & Shewey, 1994; Mac Iver, 1990).

3. Varied instruction includes (1) integrating learning experiences, addressing students' own questions and focusing upon real life issues relevant to the student; (2) actively engaging students in problem solving and accommodating individual differences; (3) emphasizing collaboration, cooperation, and community; (4) seeking to develop good people who demonstrate caring for others, democratic values, and moral sensitivity (NMSA, 1995). Some of the more common programs include multiage grouping over longer periods of time, cross-age tutoring, cooperative learning, hands-on and student-centered activities; use of block time and flexible scheduling; and positive evaluations. Learning tasks are developmentally appropriate and adapted to individual differences.

4. Exploratory programs capitalize on the innate curiosity of young adolescents, exposing them to a range of academic, vocational, and recreational subjects for career options, community service, enrichment, and enjoyment. Exploratory topics include foreign languages, intramural sports, health, clubs, student government, home economics, technological arts, independent study projects, music, art, speech, drama, careers, consumer education, creative writing, and several other special areas.

5. Transition programs focus on creating a smooth change of schools for the young adolescent. Eighty-eight percent of public school students begin the middle grades in a new school, a transition which may overwhelm the coping skills of some students and "have pathogenic effects on their psychological adjustment, self-esteem, and motivation to learn" (Mac Iver, 1990). A common solution is for elementary school students to visit the middle level school they will attend, while administrators of the elementary and middle level schools meet to discuss programs and the middle school counselors to discuss ways to help students make a smooth transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. Visits to the middle school by fifth graders were used in 90 percent of the 6-8 schools (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1995).

Practices

National Middle School Association (1995) believes that developmentally responsive middle level schools are characterized by

- a shared vision
- educators committed to young adolescents
- a positive school climate
- an adult advocate for every student
- family and community partnerships
- high expectations for all

Therefore, they provide

- a curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory
- varied teaching/learning approaches
- assessment and evaluation that promote learning
- flexible organizational structures
- programs and policies that foster health, safety, and wellness
- comprehensive guidance and support services

Related articles

1. Chapter 1, "What Is a True Middle School?" in *Building An Effective Middle School* by Romano, L. G., & Georgiady, N. P (1994). Madison, WI: WCB Brown & Benchmark.
2. Chapter 17, "Summary of Practices and Trends," in *Education in the middle grades: Overview of national practices and trends*, by Epstein, J. L., & Mac Iver, D. J. (1990). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association
3. Clark, S. N., & Clark, D. C. (1987). Middle level programs: More than academics. *Middle School Journal, 19* (1). Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

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National Middle School Association. (1995). *This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle level schools.* Columbus, OH: Author.

Recommendations of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

From *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* 1989, The Carnegie Corporation of New York

- **Create small communities for learning**, where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth.

- **Teach a core academic program** that results in students who are literate in the humanities, social and physical sciences, and who know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society.

- **Ensure success for all students** through elimination of tracking by achievement level and promotion of cooperative learning, flexibility in arranging instructional time, and adequate resources for teachers.

- **Empower teachers and administrators** to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students through creative control by school staff over the instructional program linked to greater responsibility for each student's performance.

- **Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert** at teaching young adolescents and who have been specially prepared for assignment to the middle grades.

- **Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness** of young adolescents by providing a health coordinator in every middle grade school, access to health care and counseling services, and a health-promoting school environment.

- **Reengage families in the education of young adolescents** by giving families meaningful roles in school governance, communicating with families effectively, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home.

- **Connect schools with communities** by identifying opportunities for youth service in the community, establishing partnerships and collaborations to ensure students' access to health and social services, and using community resources to enrich the instructional program.

Ten Questions to Consider in Appraising a Middle Level Program

1. Does our middle school provide ample opportunities for pupils to participate in the life of the school? To help determine its nature both in individual classrooms and school-wide?

2. Are students given ample opportunities to identify **and** develop their special interests and aptitudes as called for by their exploratory nature?

3. Do teachers have available, and do they utilize in making curriculum decisions, adequate information about each individual learner?

4. Is there a recent, well understood, fully accepted, and specific enough school philosophy or mission statement that is a **functional** guide for use in planning instruction and curriculum?

5. Does the school provide a time, a place, and an advocate for the ongoing discussion of personal, social, and related problems of youth, such as a teacher advisory program?

6. Does the organization for instruction facilitate interdisciplinary planning and instruction? Flexible use of time? Varied groupings?

7. Do teams utilize fully common planning time to integrate instruction?

8. Does the organization and the curriculum really recognize the diversity of maturity and development that exists in the middle grades beyond what an individual teacher might do in a class?

9. Does the organization provide a transition from elementary education to departmentalized high school education?

10. Is there considerable use of the community as an educational resource?

Characteristics of a "Real" Middle Level School: How Does Your School Rate?

Characteristic	Degree Present			
	None	Little	Some	Extensive
1. A positive school climate, an atmosphere of teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and student-student cooperation.	0	2	4	6
2. A definite curriculum commitment to, and a plan for dealing with, the affective aspects of education.	0	2	4	6
3. A curriculum organization plan that clearly departs from the departmentalized subject/class arrangement for a large portion of the day.	0	2	4	6
4. An extensive program of enrichment, exploratory, and interest classes as well as student activities.	0	2	4	6
5. An activity/laboratory approach, utilized for much or most instruction, as opposed to a presentation/telling approach.	0	2	4	6
6. A faculty-wide commitment to teach not only the essential skills of communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) but also problem solving, reasoning, and interpersonal skills.	0	2	4	6
7. A developmental guidance program built on the classroom teacher as adviser, but supplemented by guidance specialists.	0	2	4	6
8. Comprehensive programs of health education, physical education, and intramural sports activities.	0	2	4	6
9. A clear recognition of the social needs of early adolescents through both in-class and out-of-class activities.	0	2	4	6
10. Considerable utilization of readily available and varied instructional materials, including computers.	0	2	4	6
11. A comprehensive program of assessing student progress that provides evidence on more than the test-based acquisition of information.	0	2	4	6
12. Utilization of the community as an educational resource.	0	2	4	6

If the administrator is not an enthusiastic, caring person, and an open advocate for middle level education, subtract 20-30 points.

Subtotal _____

Grand Total _____

NMSA Research Summary #12

Academic Achievement

Question: Do middle schools result in higher achievement than junior high schools?

This question addresses the academic outcomes of students in junior high schools that are organized in a manner similar to large comprehensive high schools with departmentalization, 40-50 minute periods, subject area teachers, and competitive sports, as compared to middle schools using various degrees of the five commonly endorsed practices considered essential to the middle level model of schooling: teaming, exploratory courses, co-curricular programs, adviser-advisee arrangements, and intramural activities. These delineations, however, are not consistent, as many junior highs contain middle school components and vice versa.

The issue is complex for several other reasons. The research about achievement often relates academic gains to practices and programs (Levine, Levine, & Eubanks, 1984), not type of school. These programs may exist in junior high schools or middle schools, although "true" middle schools employ the recommended practices to a greater extent. Another factor is the paucity of research in the effectiveness of practices, the difficulty of comparing studies, and weak and conflicting research methodologies (Hough, 1989). Also, the aggregation of data may wash out the effects of variables such as organization issues and other inputs as teacher and student characteristics; as a result, many studies ignore the relationships between organizations, community, and teaching-learning outcomes (Hough, 1997).

Contextual factors may also confound the effects of a specific practice, and perceptions of teachers and principals may result in biased criterion measures (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995). For example, the research on teaming exemplifies both the complexity of numerous variables affecting outcomes, the challenges of collecting usable data from teams, and the various research methods that make generalizing from several studies difficult. As a final consideration, the assumption underlying achievement is its relationship to gains made by all types of students, making relevant programs and practices that keep at-risk students above their level of vulnerability and lower absenteeism and drop-out rate.

It is therefore understandable that studies addressing the relationship between school factors (organization/programs/practices) and achievement show mixed results.

Studies of programs and practices

Studies related to achievement and programs and practices yield varied results. Looking at the effects of teaming on achievement, two studies of the past two decades, Cotton (1982) and Armstrong (1977), concluded that neither interdisciplinary team organization nor the traditional departmental organization promoted greater student achievement. On the other hand, Bradley (1988) in an experimental study of 78 pairs of seventh graders, matched in interdisciplinary and departmental organizations, found math gains for interdisciplinary and equal reading achievement gains for both groups. Clark and Clark's (1992) meta-analysis of studies related to interdisciplinary teams of the Pontoon Transitional Design cited nine out of 10 studies conducted from 1964-1972. These studies indicated gains in achieve-

ment and/or affective outcomes, although conclusions about the model were unclear. Lee and Smith (1993) used a sub-sample of 8,845 eighth graders of the NELS:88 database and found modest positive gains in achievement and engagement in academic work for students in less departmentalized environments and "more team teaching in combination with heterogeneous groups" (Van Zandt & Totten, 1995, p. 10).

Researchers (Arhar, Johnston, & Markle, 1989; Mac Iver & Epstein, 1993; Walsh & Shay, 1993) pointed to the problems inherent in determining the effects of teaming, while Van Zandt and Totten (1995) noted inconsistent findings of team-related studies. There is also little conclusive research on the effectiveness of advisory-advisee programs on achievement.

School studies

Two of three studies related to schools and achievement show gains for restructured middle level schools. Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, and Flowers (1997) looked at the various stages of restructuring middle schools in a longitudinal study of 1,500 students and 900 teachers in schools rated on levels of implementation of recommendations of the Carnegie Council's report, ***Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*** (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). The researchers found greater student outcomes in achievement, behavior, and socio-emotional factors in schools with higher levels of implementation of *Turning Points* recommendations, compared to the more traditional approaches of junior highs.

Referring to the eight site-visit schools, Keefe, Valentine, Clark, and Irvin (1994) in a national study of leadership in middle schools successfully restructuring their middle level programs concluded, "The average scores of the eight schools generally exceeded the national norms. Student achievement as measured by reading and mathematics scores tended to exceed the national average. The percentage of students passing all courses was higher than in the national normative group... .The holding power of these schools was generally very high; five of the eight schools reported that all students completed the school year" (p.63). The significance of the holding power impacts achievement when value centers on the importance of achievement gains for all types of students.

Hough and Sills-Briegel (1997) examined 80 community-based or consolidated rural schools for relationships between middle school and demographic variables. They found significant correlations between socioeconomic status of students and achievement, confirming previous SES achievement findings.

Restructuring high school studies

Studies of high schools that are restructuring in ways similar to middle level schools conclude that more caring environments of communally organized schools, as compared to bureaucratically organized schools, affect achievement. These studies of equitable high achievement for all types of students indicate a dominance of practices which promote teacher commitment and student engagement (Bryk, 1994; Lee & Smith, 1994). Other researchers point to the importance of the school's communitarian "ethos," providing a blend of academic and social concerns in more personalized, communally organized schools and resulting in equitable student achievement (Bryk & Discoll, 1988; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Chubb, & Moe, 1990).

The academic focus of the schools with higher achievement gains lies within a social context of caring individuals who make special efforts for all students to succeed and who share common beliefs and high expectations. McLaughlin (1994) noted, "Restructuring practices then make a difference in student achievement and engagement when they support personal and sustained connections between students and adults in the school setting, and when they facilitate the sharing of knowledge about students as individuals and learners" (p. 9).

These studies confirm the findings of other researchers that, although specific practices, programs, and teachers may affect student achievement, it is more likely that the combination of teacher/student interactions, practices, and programs affect student outcomes. Mac Iver and Epstein (1991) concluded "the combined benefits of using several responsive practices simultaneously are larger than the benefits of using any one practice by itself" (p. 611).

Future research

Van Zandt and Totten (1995) pointed out the inconclusive nature of research findings related to the effects of middle school practices. Citing the causes as an insufficient number of studies, weak research designs, difficulties of comparing studies with conflicting designs, and the effects of extraneous variables on outcomes, they conclude with Strahan (1992) that investigations of patterns among practices and contextual considerations will establish a solid research base to substantiate recommended practices.

Conclusions: What we know

1. The issue is complex because many factors affect each study.
2. Schools which implement more *Turning Points* recommendations show the greatest gains in student outcomes.
3. The aim is equitable high achievement for all types of students.
4. The interrelationship of many factors affects student outcomes.
5. There is a strong link between socioeconomic status and achievement.

Related articles

Hough, D., & Irvin, J. (1995). Does it work? *Middle School Journal, 26* (3), 69-70.

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National Middle School Association's Position Statement on Academic Achievement

The middle school concept embraces academic achievement as a priority responsibility. National Middle School Association's major position paper, *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*, identifies as one of five foundational characteristics, "High Expectations for All." In the elaboration of this item the document says in part

> *Educators in developmentally responsive middle level schools hold and act upon high expectations for all students, and the students themselves have expectation for success. Such confidence promotes positive attitudes and behaviors and serves as motivation for students to achieve; low expectations lead to alienation, discouragement, and lack of effort...*
>
> *Effecting high academic achievement for all students is not simply a matter of 'raising abstract standards.' It means empowering students to learn, to become intellectually engaged, and to behave in keeping with responsible citizenship. It calls for them to develop initiative and responsibility so that they can become all they are capable of becoming.*

A full understanding of youth in these years of rapid and changeable mood swings between 10 and 15 makes it clear that, in order to gain the maximum academic achievement, schools must be sensitive and responsive to the varied developmental issues that impact young adolescents. With young adolescents, academic achievement and developmental responsiveness are closely related, even interdependent.

During the middle school years individuals undergo the most rapid and profound physical, social, and personal changes in the human life cycle. Just as they are coping with and adjusting to an erratically growing body, they must also form new social relationships with peers and adults. They face new academic demands that quite often do not coincide with their intellectual or mental development.

Therefore, while intellectual development is and must continue to be the basic responsibility of the middle school, the education and nurture of young adolescents has to be an integrated venture that provides a balance between academic rigor and humanness. The physical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of young adolescents' lives are inexorably woven together in the fabric of their existence. One's readiness to achieve academically is heavily influenced by one's personal security and self-esteem. Though sometimes derided as a trite saying, the reality is the whole child does come to school. It is the individual who learns, and the individual is a total organism. If a student faces difficulties in his or her personal and out-of-school life, that student is seriously handicapped in mastering the school's lessons. Middle schools cannot just be schooling places; they are also growing places where much of the learning that occurs deals with social and personal aspects of life that are not part of the content of the formal curriculum.

One's self-concept is the basis of reality for an individual, determining what one "sees," experiences, and perceives. Children either think they can or they can't; some say "I'll try" and then soon make up their mind as to which of the first two choices fits. This outlook on what middle school

students see about themselves is what allows them to try out for the school play, go out for sports, turn that paper back in to reach a higher standard of achievement, or do only the minimum expected, hang out with buddies after school, and never come in for extra help after class. In like manner, if a student is convinced that he/she just can't spell, new evidence to support that judgment seems always at hand and readily noted. It is important that middle school teachers provide sufficiently varied activities so that all students can achieve success by their own actions and come to see themselves as able learners.

To be most effective, then, the educational experiences provided for a particular group of students must match the nature of that group, be in concert with how they learn best, and assist them in dealing with the tasks that growing up presents at that age level. For example, a kindergarten program recognizes the physical and mental limitations of five year olds and therefore doesn't plan formal instruction for which they are not ready. In the same manner, a middle school program recognizes the great diversity of maturation that characterizes this age level and neither plans one lesson for all nor expects uniform results. Differentiated instruction becomes a necessity in order for all students to improve their academic performances. Likewise, a middle school program that is developmentally responsive will employ cooperative learning procedures, for such approaches are not only research-proven ways of increasing students' achievement, but, at the same time, they meet a clear social need of students.

The middle school is the major stage on which young people, while learning the content of the curriculum, also try out new, more adult-like roles and learn to adjust to diverse peers, the opposite sex, and adults in different roles as well as become increasingly responsible for their own behavior. Young adolescents are in the process of firming up attitudes and values that will, in the long run, determine their success in high school and beyond, a reality that cannot and should not be ignored. Middle level educational programs, therefore, seek to fulfill their broad and critically important responsibilities by integrating into school classes and activities knowledge acquisition, mastery of basic skills, and personal development. Their success in so doing will have a major impact, not only on the individuals concerned, but on the nation itself.

Adopted June 27, 1999

A Glossary of Some Middle Level Education Terms

activity period: A time during the regular school day in which students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of experiences that extend and reinforce the classroom curriculum. Some schools use this time for advisor-advisee programs, intramurals, community-based activities, elective choices for students, and similar programs, as well as for clubs and service groups, such as student council.

advisory program: Regularly scheduled times during which each young adolescent has the opportunity to interact with a small group of peers and a teacher-advisor in relation to school-oriented and personal concerns. Also called advisor-advisee or AA program.

at-risk: A term applied to students who are likely to fail in the regular program and therefore require some special assistance to be academically successful.

authentic assessment: The generic term that refers to various efforts to measure a student's achievement or progress in ways that approximate real life.

block schedule: Scheduling that provides large blocks of time for teams of teachers and their students in which flexible groupings of students and varied periods of time can be arranged. It facilitates curriculum integration. Not to be confused with the high school form of block scheduling that provides double periods for single subjects.

common learnings: That portion of the curriculum considered essential for any citizen, regardless of future occupation or station in American society.

common planning time: Regularly scheduled time during the school day in which several staff members who teach the same group of students have the same period(s) available for joint planning, conferring, and material preparation.

continuous progress: A system that enables a student to move through a learning program on the basis of successful completion of a hierarchy of learning objectives and at his/her own rate of speed without skipping or repeating.

cooperative learning: An instructional strategy that has students in groups of 3-5 working together within the classroom. Students share responsibilities as well as rewards; both individual and group accountability are provided.

correlated curriculum: A curriculum plan that features a conscious and planned effort to relate various subjects to one another.

cross-grade grouping: Grouping students of more than one grade level together, often employed in exploratory courses and teacher advisory programs.

exploratory programs: Regularly scheduled experiences in which students investigate areas of knowledge and interests, often non-academic or non-achievement oriented, for the purpose of expanding their base of experiences and identifying interests and aptitudes.

heterogeneous grouping: A grouping strategy that divides learners into groups without reference to their perceived abilities, achievement, or physical characteristics. This grouping plan is increasingly supported by research.

homogeneous grouping: A grouping strategy that divides students into groups organized around specific levels of ability and/or achievement. Essentially the same as ability grouping.

humanities programs: Interdisciplinary programs that combine subject matter ordinarily taught in the history, literature, and practical and fine arts areas.

independent study: Learning activities in which the student is very largely self-directed with teacher supervision in relation to choice of goals, topic of study, methods, and evaluation.

individualized instruction: Instruction that provides alternate routes and rates for student achievement of common or unique objectives, based on diagnosed learner needs.

integrated curriculum: A curriculum design that features active student involvement in selecting areas to be studied and activities to pursue them in a democratic context.

interdisciplinary programs: Instructional programs that seek to combine subject matter ordinarily taught separately, such as history, literature, or science, into learnings under a single organizational structure.

interdisciplinary team organization: The practice of organizing two to five teachers for instruction, using as a focus a common group of students rather than a common academic subject. This group of teachers shares the same students, schedule, area of the school, and responsibility for more than one subject.

interdisciplinary unit (IDU): A curricular unit of study developed to reflect multiple subject areas and skills in an integrated manner. Sometimes called a "thematic unit" when the focus is on a theme or problem area.

intramural programs: Activities in which all students are encouraged to participate and which are primarily sports oriented, taking place during or after the school day. The emphasis of these programs is participation and cooperation rather than competition.

learning center: A specific location in the classroom where materials and activities relating to a particular topic are placed and from which an individual can pursue independent learning.

learning resource center or media center: The centrally located place where print and non-print media are stored, organized, and made available to students and faculty.

mini-courses: Short-term courses, usually non-academic and within an exploratory program, that may last from four to twelve weeks. They are interest-centered enrichment experiences selected by students.

multi-age grouping: Placing students from more than one grade or age level in the same class for the purpose of facilitating continuous progress and developing long-term interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves.

portfolio: A file or folder kept by the student that documents his/her experiences and accomplishments. The portfolio is effective in getting students to assume responsibility for their own learning and is useful in conferences with parents.

rubric: A form that sets forth the criteria and standards by which a process, product, or performance can be assessed.

school-within-a-school: A grouping strategy that divides students into sub-schools or little schools, each with its own faculty, utilized to reduce the impact of large numbers of students in a single school.

student-teacher progression plan: An arrangement whereby a team of teachers and students stays together for two or three years, ensuring a continuity of caring and academic progress. At the elementary level this practice is called looping.

team leader: A teacher within the interdisciplinary team organization who assumes a facilitative and advocacy role for team goals and activities.

unified arts/allied arts: A coordinated program that provides exploratory opportunities within the humanities, practical arts, and fine arts.

Middle Level Education: A Basic Library*

1. *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*

   Developed by a select committee and unanimously approved by National Middle School Association's Board of Trustees, *This We Believe* provides clear guidance for those seeking to implement excellent educational programs for young adolescents. A strong rationale for middle level schools that summarizes what we know about young adolescents and the nature of our society, it should be studied and used in all middle schools.

2. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*

   Truly a landmark, no other publication has done as much to give credibility and visibility to middle level education as this study commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Required reading for middle level educators.

3. *America's Middle Schools: Practices and Progress – a 25-Year Perspective*

   This study, a benchmark — the most comprehensive one ever conducted – provides detailed information on every aspect of middle level schools. The current status data derived from a random sample of 1,798 middle level schools is summarized and reported. In addition, comparisons with studies in 1968 and 1988 are made. Conclusions, recommendations, and the authors' reflections are also included.

4. *What Current Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner*

   The most comprehensive presentation of research on middle level education available, this volume is a carefully crafted melding of research findings and understandable prose. The 31 chapters, written by acknowledged experts, cover topics such as grouping, inclusion, organization, teaming, and curriculum. An essential resource for middle level educators.

5. *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*

   Already in its 12th printing, this classic book by Joan Lipsitz is an enlightening description of what good middle schools can be and are. Four case studies of middle schools that met "threshold" criteria for excellence, including achievement scores, high parent satisfaction, and low student and teacher absenteeism are presented. Rich in detail and quality writing.

6. *Middle Level Teachers: Portraits of Excellence*

   Over 83 successful educators are shown doing what they do best in this collection of sketches, cameos, and scenarios. A celebration of the significant service of middle level teachers, this publication should be read by educators and citizens alike.

7. *Reflections From A Teacher's Heart: The Affective Side of Middle Grades Education*

   Parents, community members, and educators will be uplifted and informed by these verses that reflect the heart and soul of middle level education.

* *Copies of resources 1-14 should be made available ASAP. The other titles, selected from the many others available, are for use primarily by teachers in planning instruction or dealing with areas not of the highest priority. As funds permit, all resources should be secured.*

"David Puckett's sensitivity, intelligence, and ironic humor make this collection of poems about teaching in the middle grades a rare treat. Every middle school teachers' lounge should have a copy." (John Norton, MiddleWeb Editor)

8. *The Middle School Concept: Why It Works*

This communications resource provides educators with research-based data in support of the middle school concept – consistent with the implementation of the recommendations found in Carnegie's *Turning Points*. The kit is designed to communicate the message to school boards, parents, and the community at large that "middle schools work" when properly implemented over time and with fidelity. The kit includes CD-ROM (Mac & PC compatible) with slide presentations and support materials, *This We Believe* – NMSA's position paper, and *Turning Points* (Executive Summary version).

9. *Connecting the Curriculum Through Interdisciplinary Instruction*

This popular publication meets the needs of teachers and teams as they seek help in implementing more integrated instruction. Examples, guidelines, descriptions of successful programs, and more are included in this attractive publication that pulls together information on nearly every phase of interdisciplinary instruction.

10. *Curriculum Architecture: Creating a Place of Our Own*

Refreshing in style, candid and challenging, this publication will push your thinking on curriculum. After finishing this book, you will be well armed with advice and guidelines for building a learning-centered curriculum.

11. *Exploration: The Total Curriculum*

Do you want to make your subjects more relevant? Are you looking to engage pupils' critical thinking skills? Then this book is for you. Filled with often overlooked exploratory opportunities, *Exploration* raises ideas that will lead pupils in the pursuit of new knowlege and encourage problem solving.

12. *Celebrating Diversity: Multicultural Education in Middle Level Schools*

More than just theory, this book is a practical guide to multicultural instruction. Not only does the author explain why multicultural education is important at the middle level, he tells us how teachers and educational leaders can design a curriculum that speaks to every student.

13. *Implementing and Improving Teaming: A Handbook for Middle Level Leaders*

A practical handbook of real value, this resource offers specific suggestions to guide administration and/or team leaders in initiating and developing teaming. Various team designs, scheduling possibilities, and the roles of the principal and the team leader are among topics covered with text and figures.

14. *Academic Success Through Empowering Students*

"High levels of achievement can be realized only when students in a learning community are full participants in the decisions that affect their lives, particularly those that influence curriculum and instruction." This sentence captures the essential message of this excellent and most timely new resource. Excellent examples of empowering classes and web-based resources are included.

15. *Prescriptions for Success in Heterogeneous Classrooms*

This practical resource will provide the help teachers seek as they deal with the growing student diversity. Twenty-eight major teaching strategies are fully detailed and illustrated in reproducible pages. These activities will engage your students and get their creative juices flowing.

16. *Portfolio Assessment: A Handbook for Middle Level Teachers*

From a classroom teacher, a direct and down-to-earth presentation of a portfolio assessment system, together with a rationale. Specific guidance, examples, and forms make this the resource that teachers hesitant to initiate portfolios have needed. While not prescriptive, its realistic ring will encourage teachers and provide the assistance they need.

17. *Starting Points: How to Set Up and Run a Writing Workshop – and Much More!*

The author, a classroom teacher, describes how to operate a writing workshop that allows teachers to help students improve their writing while integrating the curriculum within the team structure. The Ten Day Writing Workshop, based on Nancie Atwell's work, is detailed day by day. The workshop is a practical and sound strategy that engages students fully. Examples of checklists and rubrics are included.

18. *The ABCs of Evaluation: 26 Alternative Ways to Assess Student Progress*

A much-needed and imaginative publication, *The ABCs of Evaluation* provides teachers with 26 specific alternative approaches to assessment – one for each letter of the alphabet. Organized as a handbook, this popular volume covers all subject areas and gives examples of techniques for assessing student progress other than by paper and pencil tests.

19. *Dynamite in the Classroom: A How-To Handbook for Teachers*

Teachers love this functional instructional handbook that provides an extensive collection of tools and techniques to produce "dynamite in the classroom." With reproducible classroom-ready activities, this handbook creates active student engagement and builds critical thinking skills.

20. *Student-Oriented Curriculum: Asking the Right Questions*

The personal story of a school year in which two teachers and 40 sixth graders achieved successes beyond their expectations, this publication makes a powerful case for actively involving students in all aspects of the teaching and learning process. The authors also include 16 lessons learned that will both encourage and guide middle level educators who seek to empower students and integrate learning.

21. *We Gain More Than We Give: Teaming in Middle Schools*

The most comprehensive book on middle level teaming ever published, this resource has extraordinary richness and depth. It provides new and valuable insights into the realities and nuances of teaming – its complexities, frustrations, benefits, and rewards. Every middle level educator, regardless of position, will profit from spending time reading intimate portraits of teams at work.

22. *Service Learning in the Middle School: Building a Culture of Service*

Addressing a topic that has become a major educational thrust in the middle school, *Service Learning* provides extensive information and guidelines for middle schools wanting to start their own service learning program. Detailed information on organizations and associations that support service learning are also included.

23. *Safe To Be Smart: Building a Culture for Standards-Based Reform in the Middle Grades*

In this significant new publication, Anne Wheelock takes the call for standards-based reforms out of the political and upper-echelon educational arenas and into the classroom. She deals fully and fairly with "the complexity of implementing standards in all classes for all students" and makes it clear that "standards-based reform involves changing not simply the content of learning but the standard operating procedures of schools."

24. *Camel-Makers: Building Effective Teacher Teams Together*

Never before have the real "gut" issues of teaming been presented in such an engaging and enlightening way as they are in this modern fable for middle level educators – a fanciful account of finding, sharing, and analyzing the "Jamal papers," the minutes of that first committee hundreds of years ago that created a camel by reconstituting a horse. The author has provided a clever, effective way to examine the inner workings and full potential of teaming.

25. *Thinking About Middle School*

Off-beat and challenging, this book will force readers to come to grips with the real issues facing middle level educators. The presentation of ideas and intriguing format will readily engage readers. Not a "how-to" book about middle school, but a "why" book about middle school.

26. *Treasure Chest: A Teacher Advisory Source Book*

Aptly titled, this best-selling book provides abundant resources. While directed primarily to teachers serving as advisors, its wealth is applicable to others as well. The 120 activities are divided into goal setting, problem solving, and communications. Many reproducible handouts are included. An introductory section provides rationale, suggestions for getting started, ways of organizing, and curriculum considerations.

These publications are all available from the National Middle School Association.
Call 1-800-528-NMSA (6672) for ordering details.
Also check NMSA's Web site at www.nmsa.org

A Basic Library for Parents

All of the following resources are available from NMSA.

1. *Living With a Work in Progress: A Parent's Guide to Surviving Adolescence*

   Laugh a lot, learn a lot from this attractive resource for parents. Written by a mother of young adolescents, this book provides true-to-life anecdotes, organized into such sections as "Uncommon Traits: Snits, Zits, and Flammable Hair," and "Schoolwork: Choosing Your Battles." Specific articles deal with a range of topics including saying "no," telephones, stereotyping, the report card, and rejection.

2. *H.E.L.P. – How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent* (Also available in Spanish)

   Designed for parents, this pamphlet provides tips for dealing with young adolescents on a range of topics including forgetting, irritability, power plays, friendships, chores, and more. Sold in packets of 50 for distribution to parents.

3. *More H.E.L.P. – Get Used to Differences*

   Additional tips on understanding and dealing with young adolescents. Focused on differences, it discusses a range of topics including denial, privacy, accepting consequences, and blossoming idealism. Sold in packets of 50 for distribution to parents.

4. *What Is A Middle School?*

   This brochure outlines the major features of a modern middle school and the nature of young adolescents. Attractively presented, the brochure is sold in packets of 50 so it can be distributed to parents, board members, and others.

5. *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*

   An honest, insightful, helpful, and comprehensive resource for parents who suddenly feel overwhelmed by their middle school child. The authors, both parents of middle school children, use the findings of experts as well as the experience of teachers and parents to address the common problems of young adolescents.

6. *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*

   Authoritative information and advice sprinkled with the real comments of parents, teachers, and the middlers themselves, this publication deals with virtually every concern a parent of a young adolescent might have. The writing is crisp, direct, and honest. All parents will feast on this rich resource.

7. *Healthy Teens: Facing the Challenges of Young Lives*

   What is it like to be a young adolescent today? To answer this question, the author draws on the expertise of national health organizations and dozens of caring professionals who show how to help teens avoid substance abuse, handle sexual harassment, and prevent crime. This book should be required reading for educators, parents, and healthcare professionals.

Key to Item II-1
Quiz on Young Adolescents: *Myth or Reality*
(pp. 9-10)

R 1.	R 13.	M 24.
M 2.	M 14.	M 25.
R 3.	R 15.	R 26.
M 4.	M 16.	M 27.
R 5.	M 17.	M 28.
M 6.	R 18	M 29.
R 7.	R 19.	R 30.
M 8.	M 20.	R 31.
R 9.	M 21.	R 32.
M 10.	M 22.	R 33
R 11.	M 23.	M 34.
M 12.		

Rating Scale for
Characteristics of a "Real" Middle Level School
(p. 37)

Points	Status
0-29	Don't let anybody know your score, just get to work
30-43	En route, emerging, but you haven't arrived
44-59	Solid, commendable, congratulations in order
60-72	Exemplary, a magnificent model! (If you told the truth.)

The above scale was created by the BOGSAT method (a bunch of guys sitting around a table); it's validity is therefore open to question.

National Middle School Association
4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300
Westerville, Ohio 43081
1-800-528-6672
www.nmsa.org

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